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PROVISIONAL SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 38th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Wednesday, 20 July 1994, at 10 a.m.

President : Mr. DANGUE REWAKA (Gabon)
(Vice-President)

CONTENTS

Social, humanitarian and human rights questions: reports of subsidiary bodies, conferences and related questions:

(a) Special economic, humanitarian and disaster relief assistance

(f) Social development questions

(h) Narcotic drugs

(i) International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction

(j) Cultural development

(k) United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

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The meeting was called to order at 10.50 a.m.

SOCIAL, HUMANITARIAN AND HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS: REPORTS OF SUBSIDIARY BODIES, CONFERENCES AND RELATED QUESTIONS

(a) SPECIAL ECONOMIC, HUMANITARIAN AND DISASTER RELIEF ASSISTANCE (A/49/204-E/1994/90, A/49/205-E/19943/91, E/1994/22, E/1994/66, E/1994/67, E/1994/77; E/1994/NGO/2, E/1994/NGO/3)

(f) SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT QUESTIONS (A/49/204-E/1994/90, A/49/205-E/1994/91)

(h) NARCOTIC DRUGS (A/49/139-E/1994/57, E/1994/30, E/1994/42)

(i) INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR NATURAL DISASTER REDUCTION (A/49/204-E/1994/90, A/49/205-E/1994/91; A/CONF.172/4 and Add.1-4; E/1994/85, E/1994/87)

(j) CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT (A/49/159-E/1994/62 and Add.1 and 2)

(k) UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES (E/1994/41)

Mr. HANSEN (Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs) said that while the most severe phase of the emergency in Somalia was over, the humanitarian situation there remained precarious and there was a need for continued relief assistance for vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. The difficulties and delays in achieving a lasting political settlement had a direct impact on the security situation, which continued to impede the efficient delivery of humanitarian assistance and the transition from relief to reconstruction and development. Despite those obstacles, the international community, together with Somali relief organizations and personnel, had been able to make significant progress in assisting Somalis in all parts of the country. The United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM), United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations had continued their humanitarian work in the face of serious security constraints which had claimed the lives of many Somali and expatriate relief workers.

There had been an overall improvement in the nutritional status of the population, and health facilities had been upgraded over the past 12 months. Humanitarian organizations and a number of non-governmental organizations continued to support hospitals and health centres throughout the country and training was being provided to community health workers, traditional birth attendants and laboratory technicians. Nevertheless, the health and nutritional status of large segments of the population remained precarious. Mortality rates were still high and cholera, tuberculosis and malaria posed serious health problems for a large number of vulnerable groups.

(Mr. Hansen)

Communicable and preventable diseases were being dealt with through the provision of essential drugs, medical supplies and equipment. Prompt action to coordinate the efforts of various agencies had been instrumental in containing a recent cholera epidemic and keeping fatality rates reasonably low. A number of organizations were facing resource shortages, since they had had to divert funds and supplies from ongoing programmes in order to tackle the epidemic at very short notice.

The food supply situation remained serious for a large segment of the population. Farming activities continued to be seriously hampered by the massive displacement of people and the slow pace of their return to their farms owing to the prevailing insecurity. In the field of education, United Nations agencies and several non-governmental organizations had taken numerous steps to rehabilitate primary and Koranic schools.

There were still some 220,000 Somali refugees registered in camps in Kenya, of whom up to 70,000 were expected to return to Somalia during the remainder of 1994. Adequate resources must be made available to UNHCR and cooperating non-governmental organizations to enable them to continue the repatriation programme and implement community-based reintegration projects.

One of the major problems in Somalia was that of the estimated 400,000 internally displaced persons. There was an urgent need to implement a coordinated assistance programme for displaced persons, using a phased approach. UNOSOM was carrying out a programme to resettle such persons, in the hope that there would be sufficient improvements in the security situation. Attempts were also being made to assist in mine removal and demobilization. An encouraging start had been made in assisting demobilization in north-west Somalia. If political leaders honoured their commitment to voluntary disarmament, it would be possible to start a programme for demobilizing and reintegrating armed militias throughout the country. Many militia members were teenagers who needed training to facilitate their reintegration into civil society.

Assistance for reconstruction would be directed to those regions which established minimum security conditions for implementing activities. To date, multi-donor missions had been working with authorities in two regions, and profiles for additional regions had been prepared as a basis for future missions to review the priority needs of those regions.

Humanitarian organizations were working closely with UNOSOM to improve the coordination of international humanitarian efforts, plans and strategies.

(Mr. Hansen)
The main objective for the remainder of 1994 was to ensure that, whenever feasible, the deployment of UNOSOM troops and the strengthening of the Somali police would complement the implementation of humanitarian activities. Despite concerted efforts, such activities continued to face difficult security constraints. Increased banditry and fighting, together with attacks against humanitarian agencies and their staff, had forced a number of United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations to suspend their assistance programmes in some areas and reduce or withdraw their staff. The most pressing need now in Somalia was for national reconciliation and peace. Although humanitarian assistance would continue to be provided without preconditions to meet requirements, the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of such assistance must be improved. Moreover, if reconstruction and long-term development were to be addressed effectively, peace and security must prevail.

On 6 February 1994, a major earthquake had struck western Uganda, affecting more than 50,000 people. According to available information, almost $500,000 had been provided by the international community, including assistance in kind, to cope with the effects of the disaster. The Governments of Italy, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, Japan and Norway had all made significant contributions.

The extent of the devastation had demonstrated clearly that neither the national Government nor development agencies had been adequately prepared for such a disaster. The challenge, for both the Ugandan Government and its development partners, was to ensure that the emergency response was viewed in the broader context of national development measures, particularly those that could reduce future susceptibility to disasters and their negative consequences.

Mr. SOMMEREYNS (Director, Department of Political Affairs) said that the report of the Secretary-General on United Nations Assistance for the Reconstruction and Development of Lebanon (UNARDOL) was in preparation and would be submitted to the General Assembly at its forty-ninth session. Profound changes had taken place in Lebanon. The consolidation of authority by the Government, improved security and growing confidence in the prospects for reconstruction were reflected in the increased presence of United Nations organizations in that country. Owing to those positive developments, United Nations operational activities had increased with respect to humanitarian assistance, emergency rehabilitation, integrated area development, drug control enforcement, environmental health and agriculture. The improved

(Mr. Sommereyns)

performance was also due to emergency rehabilitation assistance for South Lebanon. The UNARDOL Coordinator had continued to provide leadership in support of national objectives and programmes for the reconstruction and development of Lebanon and to promote the activities of different inter-agency working groups and task forces.

Field-level coordination had been complemented by the system-wide coordination ensured by the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs. The entire United Nations system had extended full cooperation and support to UNARDOL. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), one of the largest contributors, had implemented projects in the areas of institutional rehabilitation and policy advice; social reconstruction; balanced economic development; and environment. The World Bank had extended a loan of $175 million for the Emergency Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Project, $2 million of which had been disbursed to finance high-priority emergency reconstruction in the electricity, water and educational sectors and to provide credit for housing and technical assistance. In late June, two World Bank loans for irrigation and fiscal management projects, amounting to $77 million, had been approved. A $13-million project of the World Food Programme (WFP) was providing supplementary feeding to the poorest rural and urban population groups through educational, health and social welfare institutions. The coordinated response to the emergency in South Lebanon and the western Bekaa in July 1993 had been a major accomplishment of UNARDOL during the reporting period. The United Nations system, the High Relief Committee and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working together had provided emergency relief during and immediately after the acute phase of the crisis, and their inter-agency needs assessment had resulted in a joint appeal of US$ 28 million. They had also prepared and implemented emergency rehabilitation in the housing, agricultural and health sectors. Thanks to the UNARDOL Coordinator's active follow-up of the joint appeal, the Government had been able to cover all emergency relief and rehabilitation needs resulting from the events of July 1993.

Since its establishment, UNARDOL had helped to focus international attention on Lebanon during the civil war, assisted the Lebanese Government in mobilizing the necessary resources following the signature of the Taif accords, and carried out reconstruction and rehabilitation programmes in the context of post-conflict peace-building. However, the full effect of enhanced development activities was not expected to be felt before the end of the

(Mr. Sommereyns)

1994-1995 biennium. In the meantime, UNARDOL should continue to play its catalytic role, supporting Government efforts and facilitating activities of the United Nations system aimed at the economic recovery, reconstruction and development of Lebanon.

Mr. JAEGER (Deputy Assistant Administrator of UNDP and Acting Director, Regional Bureau for Arab States), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on assistance to Yemen (E/1994/67) and the report of the Secretary-General on emergency assistance to Madagascar (E/1994/66), said that since July 1993, United Nations agencies in Yemen had been forced to function under conditions of increasing political instability and, ultimately, armed conflict. Under the leadership of the Resident Coordinator, the agencies had played an active role in responding to emergency needs during the fighting. Drawing on emergency reserves or special programmes, they had coordinated the delivery of medicines, basic food supplies and medical equipment. When the fighting had ended, they had undertaken a joint mission to Aden and the southern region to assess the needs of the population. In collaboration with other donors and non-governmental organizations, they had addressed people's most immediate needs - food, fresh drinking water and medical supplies. UNDP had transported three tankers of diesel fuel from Sana'a for the pumping of water. A shuttle water service of 15 tankers would be carrying fresh water from Lahej to Aden, where the shortage of safe drinking water was aggravating the risk of epidemics. UNDP had also obtained the Government's agreement to reprogramme between US$ 4 and $5 million of its indicative planning figure (IPF) towards the immediate rehabilitation of water, sewage and electrical systems.

The Government would have to rehabilitate war-damaged basic infrastructure and re-establish the normal functions of the State in order to address the country's long-standing socio-economic problems. That would require greater and better coordinated economic assistance from the international community.

Emergency assistance to Madagascar in the aftermath of the natural disasters there had been very effective. UNDP had played a significant role in coordinating assistance from bilateral donors, United Nations agencies and international and non-governmental organizations, including CARE International and Caritas. The Resident Coordinator had acted as spokesman for the international community in talks with the Government and had coordinated the efforts of the various committees established to respond to the crisis.

(Mr. Jaeger)

Each of the United Nations agencies had provided assistance in its area of competence, mainly in the form of technical assistance and food. UNDP had offered disaster preparedness training to its national counterparts and had established two crisis units to coordinate the efforts of international donors. Those units had been bolstered by the establishment of a National Aid Council to deal with emergency situations. In the last two months, the donor community had restored the railway, main roads and communications with remote areas. It had also helped to provide technical assistance, equipment and credit to rebuild housing units, rural dispensaries and schools. However, additional efforts were necessary in order to cope with cyclone damage. Many people in Madagascar were still homeless, living in tents or temporary housing, and the risk of a food shortage remained very high.

Mr. PETERS (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)), introducing the summary report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (E/1004/41), said that in 1993, the Office had assisted some 23 million people, including some 16.4 million refugees and certain groups of internally displaced persons. By far the greatest tragedy in the past year had been the political and ethnic conflicts in Burundi and Rwanda. In recent days, as many a 1 million additional refugees had fled to Zaire, bringing the total number of refugees outside Rwanda to over 2 million persons. Relief flights had resumed on 19 July after the shelling of Goma had ceased: some 14 flights were scheduled to provide assistance.

Early warning signals in Rwanda had enabled UNHCR to make initial preparations for the emergency through the rapid deployment of emergency teams and the prepositioning of relief supplies. In close cooperation with the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, WFP, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), UNDP, United Nations Volunteers, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organization (WHO) and numerous NGOs, the Office was coordinating a massive emergency assistance operation in the various countries of asylum. However, the current crisis in Zaire entailed enormous humanitarian needs. Food requirements alone would amount to 600 metric tons per day, water resources were desperately scarce, and local infrastructure to support a major humanitarian operation was virtually non-existent. Moreover, the presence of such large numbers of refugees in a volatile region had provoked friction with the local population, increasing the risks for humanitarian aid workers. In Rwanda, meanwhile, thousands of

(Mr. Peters)

people were reportedly suffering from malnutrition, and if crops could not be harvested before the end of July the Rwandese would be completely reliant on humanitarian aid.

The report described a number of successes, including the repatriation of 380,000 refugees to Cambodia within the framework of the Paris Peace Agreement; the conclusion of an agreement on voluntary repatriation from Bangladesh to Myanmar; the historic developments in South Africa; and the repatriation of over 700,000 Mozambican refugees from six neighbouring countries.

Successes at the regional level included the implementation of the Comprehensive Plan of Action for Indo-Chinese Refugees (CPA) and the formal conclusion of the process initiated under the International Conference on Central American Refugees (CIREFCA). Under the Comprehensive Plan of Action, some 62,000 Vietnamese refugees had voluntarily returned to their country from camps in South-East Asia and Hong Kong. At the closing ceremony of CIREFCA, an eight-point plan had been adopted to address outstanding tasks, in particular, development for the most disadvantaged areas and population groups.

Increasingly, UNHCR was operating within the broader framework of international and regional peace-keeping and peace-building activities. In the former Yugoslavia, it was lead agency for relief and assistance. It had participated in the inter-Tajik talks in Moscow in order to help address the problem of displacement in Tajikistan. Following the conclusion of the Quadripartite Agreement on a peaceful settlement of the Abkhaz conflict, an agreement had been signed by the parties, the Russian Federation and UNHCR on the return of displaced persons to Abkhazia. More generally, the High Commissioner was involved in consultations with the Russian Federation and the successor States of the Soviet Union with a view to developing a comprehensive approach to the problem of refugees, returnees, internally displaced persons and migrants in that region.

The expanded scale of UNHCR activities had increased funding requirements, which would amount to $1.23 billion for 1994. He expressed concern over decreasing support for General Programmes - the core activities carried out by UNHCR - in the past three years. Special Programmes were also in need of greater support. Programmes in Georgia, Azerbaijan and Tajikistan and the cross-border programme from Kenya to Somalia had been affected by the shortage of funds.

Mr. ELO (Director of the Secretariat of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR) and Secretary-General of the World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction) introduced the report of the Secretary-General of the Conference on the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (A/CONF.172/4 and Add.1-4) which, together with other documents had been prepared by the IDNDR secretariat for the mid-term review of the implementation of the International Framework of Action.

Contrary to expectations at the outset of the Decade, there had been a steady increase in the number of natural disasters, the number of victims and the overall economic losses caused by disasters. Disasters linked to environmental deterioration, such as floods and droughts were increasing. Population increase and urbanization were forcing more people to live in disaster-prone areas, and poorly controlled technology was creating new hazards.

Against that pessimistic backdrop, however, changes were taking place. Developed countries had been able to apply available knowledge and technology to reduce the effects of natural disasters, and effective early warning and local disaster management systems had saved lives in developing countries.

With a fraction of what was invested in emergency relief - not to mention military intervention - it would be possible to strengthen national disaster prevention and preparedness programmes or to include mitigation plans in national development plans, and yet investment in prevention was limited because budgets for emergency operations were overstretched.

One positive development was increased awareness of the benefits of disaster reduction. Many countries were introducing disaster prevention and preparedness into their development budgets, and financial institutions were including disaster reduction in their programmes. Regional and intergovernmental organizations were also more aware of the importance of disaster reduction. The World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction, held in Yokohama, Japan, from 23 to 27 May 1994, had had a combined political, technical and scientific focus. The Conference had brought together different constituencies and sectors of society from 155 countries. It had culminated in the adoption by consensus of the Yokohama Strategy for a Safer World. In a spirit of inter-agency cooperation, major organizations of the United Nations system, scientific associations and non-governmental organizations had all contributed to the organization and financing of the Conference's scientific and technical programme. The host country, Japan, had contributed most of the

(Mr. Elo)

financing for the Conference and, together with other Governments or financial institutions, had provided for the participation of developing countries. Almost 100 national reports had bene submitted, identifying areas for potential cooperation.

The reports submitted to the Council stressed the need to strengthen the capacities of developing countries, regional cooperation and the transfer of existing knowledge and affordable technology in the second half of the Decade. They also pointed to the close linkages between disaster, and sustainable development and the cost-effectiveness of disaster reduction.

Mr. ARFWEDSON (Coordinator, World Decade for Cultural Development), introducing the progress report on the World Decade for Cultural Development (A/49/159-E/1994/62 and Add.1 and 2), said that, since the previous report, activities under the World Decade for Cultural Development had grown considerably in volume and importance and had benefited from a higher degree of commitment by States and organizations. Since the Decade's inception, hundreds of thousands of people throughout the world had been directly concerned by the projects initiated within its framework. Decade activities, often based on themes associating culture with a particular aspect of development or targeting specific population groups, had had a multiplier effect at the local level.

During the biennium 1992-1993, several important steps had been taken, including such major projects as the creation of the World Commission on Culture and Development. The first phase of the project to elaborate a methodology for integrating cultural factors into development programmes and projects had also been completed.

In the course of the mid-term evaluation, the Intergovernmental Committee of the Decade had noted with satisfaction that the rate of project implementation had increased after a slow start partly explained by the rather complex message that the Decade had set out to convey. The Committee had approved the launching of several major regional projects and had urged that a greater emphasis be placed on the Decade's first objective: acknowledging the cultural dimension of development. Several projects under way or in the pipeline, such as the Alexandria library project, required substantial budgets. Since 1992, 21 May had been observed as the Day for Cultural Development, centered each year on a specific theme.

With regard to the participation of the United Nations system, the Intergovernmental Committee welcomed the increased participation of

(Mr. Arfwedson)

United Nations agencies in implementing the programme of the Decade. Further impetus might be provided by the international community's growing awareness that a development model based exclusively on economic growth carried with it great risks of creating social and cultural imbalances. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development had launched a process of reflection on "people-centered" development which would be continued at the World Summit for Social Development in 1995. Those two meetings should pave the way for a more general recognition of the importance of the cultural dimension in all development endeavours, at both the policy-making and the operational level.

Mr. GHODSE (International Narcotics Control Board (INCB)) said that the dialogue between the Board and the Council was an important part of the Board's mandate to oversee the implementation of international drug control treaties. In its report (E/1994/42), the Board urged the international community to increase its cooperation and to mobilize greater resources for drug control. With the end of the cold war and the development of closer ties between countries, the greater openness of national borders had been exploited by organized crime and drug cartels, and a fundamental change in the level and nature of illegal trafficking had taken place.

At its most recent session, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs had adopted a resolution on the role of INCB, calling on Governments to adopt and publicize the necessary measures to enforce drug control treaties. The Commission had encouraged the Board to include in its reports constructive suggestions on how Governments might adjust their domestic legislation to treaty provisions.

He gratefully acknowledged the professional support provided to INCB by the United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) and was confident that such support would continue. He drew attention, however, to the difficulties created by the Board's exclusive reliance on regular budget resources. Its budgetary allocation had not been increased for years, while operating costs had risen steadily. That situation might ultimately have an impact on its ability to take on new tasks and challenges.

Cooperation between Governments and the Board was generally very good, one particularly fruitful area being the prevention of attempts to divert psychotropic substances. However, Governments did not always respect their reporting obligations under the international drug control treaties. Furthermore, Governments' cooperation with the Board in implementing provisions concerning chemical precursors needed to be enhanced.

(Mr. Ghodse)

He believed that the international community had no choice but to strengthen international drug control without delay and that it must make a strong common political commitment to that daunting task.

(a) SPECIAL ECONOMIC, HUMANITARIAN AND DISASTER RELIEF ASSISTANCE

Mr. ROESCH (Germany), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said that he wished to offer some suggestions regarding disaster relief. Faced with an increase in the number of natural disasters and complex emergencies, and the resulting devastation, relief efforts must balance the immediate needs of the most vulnerable groups, who were usually those most severely affected in such circumstances, and the medium- and long-term development needs of the area concerned. Sustainability was the key to the long-term effectiveness of humanitarian and economic aid. The European Union had participated actively in bilateral and multilateral relief and rehabilitation efforts and supported the concept of the relief, rehabilitation and development continuum.

Over the years, a growing number of resolutions had been adopted appealing for humanitarian and economic aid. The European Union recognized that the needs in question were urgent, but was concerned that the large number of individual resolutions might actually be counterproductive. It therefore proposed that the issue should be approached through an omnibus resolution, as discussed in the Second Committee at the forty-eighth session of the General Assembly. It would be happy to participate in the preparation of such a text.

The PRESIDENT invited the Council to take note of the oral reports on assistance to Somalia and Uganda, assistance for the reconstruction and development of Lebanon, and the situation of refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa, and the reports contained in documents E/1994/66 and E/1994/67 on assistance to Madagascar and Yemen.

It was so decided.

(i) INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR NATURAL DISASTER REDUCTION

Mr. ROESCH (Germany), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said that natural disaster reduction was a global issue but had yet to achieve the desired political impact. The European Union expected that, in line with the Yokohama Strategy for a Safer World, adequate cooperation would develop between the IDNDR secretariat and the Disaster Mitigation Branch. Furthermore, the Director of the IDNDR secretariat should have the necessary

(Mr. Roesch, Germany)

authority and should be able to report directly to the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs. The obstacles to an action-oriented approach could be overcome by tapping the potential of IDNDR more fully. The Yokohama Conference had been an important step forward and the Strategy provided a realistic, unbiased status report on natural disaster reduction and a feasible plan for the second half of the Decade and beyond.

Disaster prevention could no longer be considered in isolation, it must become an integral part of the continuum of relief, rehabilitation and development. Only then would a global culture of prevention take shape. The European Union would continue to support IDNDR, with a view to streamlining its operations to ensure a more action-oriented, practical approach.

Mr. GHAFOORZAI (Observer for Afghanistan) said that Trust Fund resources for the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction should give priority to the early warning system for least developed, landlocked and small island developing States. Within the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, several existing activities should be regrouped and strengthened in order to create an emergency centre for humanitarian assistance and reporting. Such a centre would maintain statistics on available aid and services, secure and provide the required assistance on an emergency basis and systematically enrich its data on the capabilities of disaster-prone countries, submitting recommendations to such countries on how they might improve their disaster mitigation capabilities.

Mr. YE Dabo (China) said the Yokohama Strategy for a Safer World and the Yokohama Message, adopted at the World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction, had provided important guidelines for further activities under the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction. Since natural disasters often struck across national frontiers, disaster reduction was a shared responsibility of all States. It was estimated that 90 per cent of natural disasters occurred in developing countries, and 65 per cent of the related deaths and injuries were sustained by those same countries. Thus, the international community and, in particular, the developed countries should increase financial aid and technology transfers in the field of disaster reduction to the developing countries, so as to enable them to build their capacity for disaster mitigation.

Ms. INAGA (Japan) said that the World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction had provided an opportunity to consider future ways of mitigating natural disasters and had generated interest in the International

(Ms. Inaga, Japan)

Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction on the part of the international community, and in particular, policy makers. The Plan of Action adopted at the Conference identified specific actions to be taken at all levels and emphasized international cooperation and the need to provide adequate support for follow-up activities, including a review conference at the end of the Decade. Her delegation urged the Council to endorse the conclusions of the World Conference and called on all States to further the implementation of the Yokohama Strategy.

Mr. MARTYNENKO (Ukraine) said that the convening of the World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction and the documents adopted at that Conference indicated there was greater recognition of the problems related to natural disaster mitigation. Supporting the efforts of the developing countries to reduce their vulnerability to natural disasters, he stressed that the Principles contained in the Yokohama Strategy for a Safer World stated specifically that each country bore the primary responsibility for protecting its people, infrastructure and other national assets from the impact of natural disasters. Although some results had been achieved during the first half of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, they had not been equal in all areas. His delegation favoured expanding the concept of natural disasters to include other emergency situations related to ecological and technological disasters and believed that the activities of the United Nations in the area of natural disaster reduction should be maintained beyond the Decade.

(k) UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES (UNHCR)

Mr. SNOUSSI (Morocco) said that while his delegation appreciated the increasing role of UNHCR in assisting refugees throughout the world, it regretted that certain errors regarding the situation in Western Sahara had slipped into the UNHCR report contained in document E/1994/41. Specifically, the inaccurate description of the united Nations settlement plan contained in paragraph 188 of that report could prolong the suffering of the refugees in camps in Jindouf and delay their return. According to Security Council resolution 809 (1993), in conformity with the settlement plan regarding the questions of Western Sahara (S/21360 and S/22464), it was for the Secretary-General to determine the instructions for the review of the applications for participation in the referendum. UNHCR had implied incorrectly in its report that the agreement of the parties regarding the criteria for voter eligibility

(Mr. Snoussi, Morocco)

was a precondition for the implementation of the settlement plan. In its resolution 907 (1994), the Security Council had agreed that the identification and registration of potential voters should be carried out on the basis of the Secretary-General's compromise proposal. Therefore, the issue raised by UNHCR in its report was obsolete, especially since the other side had addressed a letter to the President of the Security Council in which it had accepted Security Council resolution 907 (1994). In order to preserve the credibility of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, his delegation asked that paragraph 188 of the report (E/1994/41) be amended in line with the relevant reports of the Secretary-General and resolutions of the Security Council regarding the situation in Western Sahara.

Mr. LEBEDEV (Russian Federation) said that the Russian Federal Migration Service (FMS) had estimated that there were currently more than 500,000 refugees, 1 million displaced persons and 500,000 economic migrants in Russia and that the overall number of new immigrants to Russia could reach 6 million people. The lack of adequate financial and material resources to meet the needs of refugees in accordance with the terms of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees had led to a critical situation.

The situation of refugees in Russia and in other former Republics of the Soviet Union reaffirmed the conclusions of the United Nations World Conference on Human Rights regarding the need to adopt a comprehensive approach to the coordination of international action with regard to refugees, displaced persons and migrants. The adoption, at the forty-eighth session of the General Assembly, of resolution 48/113 on the convening of a United Nations conference for the comprehensive consideration and review of the problems of refugees, returnees, displaced persons, and migrants was a step towards finding a solution to those problems at the global level. While his country had encountered difficulties in dealing with the situation of refugees, it in no way intended to depart from the commitments it had undertaken in acceding to the 1951 Convention. The Russian Federation intended to become a member of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the High Commissioner for Refugees and was committed to increasing international cooperation for the protection of the rights of refugees and displaced persons. By adopting measures in that field, the international community would help to curb the dangerous trend towards an uncontrolled increase in refugee flows and establish a framework for the voluntary repatriation of such individuals. The signing of a

(Mr. Lebedev, Russian Federation)

Quadripartite Agreement on the voluntary repatriation of refugees and displaced persons to Abkhazia and the establishment of a Quadripartite Commission with the participation of the Russian Federation and UNHCR were practical measures that had helped to manage the repatriation process in that region.

Mr. GHAFOORZAI (Afghanistan) said that his country had perhaps the largest number of refugees requiring urgent international assistance. Considering the gravity of the plight of Afghan refugees, his delegation would have appreciated a more extensive analysis of that situation in the UNHCR report. There were currently more than 3.5 million Afghans living aborad who were unable to return to their homes for a variety of reasons, including the existence of more than 10 million land mines and the lack of sufficient funds from UNHCR.

Referring to paragraph 125 of the report, which recalled the case of Afghan refugees in New Delhi, he noted his delegation's appreciation for the assistance received by India. However, the UNHCR grant had been the sole source of support for those refugees, and had been discontinued because of budgetary constraints. On behalf of the refugees, his delegation urged UNHCR to seriously consider reinstating that assistance until the individuals in question were in a position to return home.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.